BRAZOS COUNTY
ROAD AND BRIDGE DEPARTMENT

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County Engineer

Introduction

The Brazos County Engineer's Road and Bridge Office receive many requests to alter speed limits on a number of different types of roads within the county. This document better describes the reason for speed limits and the process of changing speed limits, especially those on county roads.

Authority to set speed limits

In Texas, basic speed limits are set in accordance with Transportation Code, Chapter 545, Subchapter H, "Speed Restrictions," These are considered "prima facie" limits, that is, they are subject to change when information can be supplied that would justify a change. Authority to change speed limits in various jurisdictions is as follows:

- State Highways, including Interstate Highways and State Highways inside cities: by Texas Department of Transportation
- City roads and streets other than state highways: by the city through engineering study (of not lower than 25 mph)
- County roads: by County Commissioners through engineering study provided by the county (of not lower than 30 mph).

Factors considered in establishing speed limits

- Traffic characteristics inconsistent with particular land use or other conditions.
- Prevailing speeds consistently higher or lower than the statutory speed limit.
- Transition between rural and urban areas on major highways.
- Schools or other significant pedestrian traffic areas.
- Road construction activity.
- Frequent collisions in which speed is a contributing cause.
- Unusual or unanticipated conditions.

After a speed limit is established, there may be changes in conditions that could lead to further traffic engineering study to determine if it needs to be raised or lowered.

Correlation between speed limits and crashes

Attention and behavior varies from driver to driver. Therefore driver expectations differ, leading to different traveled speeds on a section of a road. The goal of the speed limit is to indicate to motorists a reasonable speed under good conditions that will provide adequate reaction and stopping time on that road. This in turn leads to more uniform travel speeds that reduce tailgating and lane changing, major causes of traffic crashes.

Traffic Engineering Studies

Traffic studies are compilation of data that reflect actual traffic conditions and roadway characteristics and also include an analysis using long accepted engineering principles to determine an appropriate speed limit. Traffic studies used to determine changes in speed limits are often called speed studies. Characteristics used include:

- Traffic volumes
- Number and types of intersecting roads, streets and other access points
- Roadway and road shoulder widths
- Traffic crash history
- Prevailing speeds (85th percentile)

85th percentile speed
The 85th percentile speed is the speed at or below which 85 percent of the motorists drive on a given road when unaffected by slower traffic or poor weather. This speed indicates the speed that most motorists on that road consider safe and reasonable under ideal conditions. This is used as an aid to set the appropriate speed limit for that road.

Speed concerns in residential areas
Enforcement of speed limits is the responsibility of various law enforcement officials. Requests to patrol these areas can be made to the appropriate agency. Bear in mind that most motorists in a residential area probably live in that area. They are accustomed to conditions and travel a speed that is believed to be safe and reasonable. However, it is quite common for residents to believe that traveled speeds are greater than actually being traveled. If the speed limit is determined in the proper manner, and there is evidence of excessive speeds, the appropriate law enforcement agency should be contacted so that speed limits on that section of road may be enforced.

If attempts at enforcement do not achieve desired results, further investigation from the responsible agency should be requested. Conditions may justify a lowering of the speed limit, but may also actually require use of other techniques. These would be determined through different types of traffic studies that could lead to use of other traffic control devices and improvements. For county roads, those requests would be directed to the Brazos County Engineer.

The difference between the posted speed limit and advisory speeds
Posted speed limits are for ideal conditions (Driving a passenger vehicle in good weather with dry pavement). It is the responsibility of motorists to maintain control of their vehicle at all times. Speeds should be adjusted for weather conditions, at night, pedestrian and bicycle activity, and for hills and curves. On county roads, speed limits are enforced based on the posted speed limit. The posted speed limit will be placed on a regulatory sign which would have black letters on a white background.

Many times advisory speeds are posted at hills, curves, intersections and other potential hazards to warn motorists of the hazard and provide appropriate speed for the condition. These are usually small placard signs with black letters on a yellow background placed under a larger warning sign. These are not specifically enforced, but ignoring these signs may be considered as contributing factors in an accident if investigation shows this.

Individual Request for Speed Limit Reduction:
1. Must pass a petition.
2. The petition must have:
    a) Name of Road (The road must be a County Road .)
    b) Starting point
    c) Ending point
    d) Requested speed

3. For the petition to be valid it must contain the signatures of **80%** of the property owners from the starting point to the ending point.
4. Turn the petition in to the Brazos County Commissioners Court.

Please call the Brazos County Engineer's Office at **(979) 822-2127** with any questions regarding the petition process.